

The importance of direct, strong and collaborative relationships in the OOH industry

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One only has to take a look at the last Cannes award that took place recently to notice that this industry event is now no longer filled with advertising agency folk patting each other on the back and celebrating their own creativity (normally at their clients' expense) but more and more traditional media owners like Google and Yahoo are starting to set up camp and engage the very same clients that these agencies used to once act as intermediaries for. As margins become slimmer across the industry more and more clients are looking to stretch their marketing budgets by engaging with media owners and technology companies directly quite often at the expense of creative agencies.

Technology has been a boon to creativity and has enabled almost anyone to come up with ideas and campaigns that would not have been possible before, this has given rise to smaller more boutique agencies that are slowly chipping away at budgets that were ordinarily reserved for the larger more corporate agencies, while these ad-tech firms are gleefully forecasting the demise of the advertising middle men, their hopes may not prove to be realised for a couple of reasons - One: Ad tech firms have introduced so much complexity into the business that most clients are likely to hold onto their agencies for advice; and secondly, agencies' actual creative services are likely to remain in demand when brands are having to churn out so many different pieces of content.



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As budgets get cut further and further and clients request more and more value for money we have seen a huge rise in creative, cross-over campaigns that span multiple platforms that don't really fit into one particular category and more often than not it's the lines between OOH and digital are becoming quite blurred. One only has to look at the recent "Coca-Cola Rainbow Nation" campaign earlier this year.

Coke created a giant rainbow atop its billboard-covered building in Johannesburg using some technological wizardry, high-powered water cannons, the sun and some creative licence.

The brand also created these rainbows above its many billboards across the area. And to make things even more fun - and to quell people's curiosity about what's at the end of the rainbow - some installations brought the rainbow down to the ground which resulted in some celebratory water antics.

On the face of it this was a classic OOH campaign - a billboard with an activation taking place around the surrounding areas, but with the right PR and digital intervention the media value obtained through a cleverly edited Youtube clip far exceeded the value in media that would have been obtained through a straight "reach and frequency" buy from an in-house OOH planning department.

Which brings me to my earlier point about collaboration (or the lack thereof right now) - OOH as an industry is huge and is quite expansive and can be anything from a billboard on the side of a highway, a wall-mounted digital board in a shopping mall, right through to a wrapped cup in a coffee house. This means that agencies are simply overwhelmed with the sheer volume of OOH operators and "outdoor advertising" media owners - which has given rise to two issues, the smaller operators get sidelined by agencies in favour of the bigger operators who are able to offer a one-stop shop and a suite of OOH opportunities through a single point of contact, which is all well and good, but more often than not these locations and opportunities may not actually be the best solution to the client and are simply proposed and motivated for no other reason than it's just easy to deal with one operator, or the other issue that arises is the rise of the aggregator - the smaller **aggregators** OOH agency that deals with all these smaller media owners "on behalf" of the client, they generally engage with all these multiple operators and collate all this info into a nice easy format for a client to evaluate - which sounds great

in principle but more often than not this stifles creativity in that creative and innovative mediums and concepts are quite often not submitted as it does "not meet the brief".

There will always be a need for brief-driven proposals - quite often clients are simply looking for a good old-fashioned reach and frequency campaign that gets their brand as far and wide as possible to their specific target market, but if you are looking to get more value for money and to stretch your client's budget that much further, you will find that more often than not it's the smaller more boutique specialist media owners are able to solve your clients a lot easier and are probably more focused on developing unique, exciting and original campaigns.

At Tractor Outdoor we have made a point of working closely with both clients and agencies to come up with bespoke, cutting-edge campaigns that amplify a client's message through as many platforms as possible. A couple of great examples have been the "Converse Clash Wall" and the "Coca-Cola Sound Wall".

Converse Clash Wall

The event took place at the V&A Waterfront earlier this year. Converse Africa in collaboration with Tractor Outdoor implemented South Africa's first live graffiti exhibition with creative suggestions being spurred on via the #clashwall #CT twitter hashtags.

A local street artist was on hand bridging the gap between outdoor and social media by creating the concepts that were suggested by inspired Twitter fans. People were then encouraged to snap pictures and share them amongst social media platforms.



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Coca-Cola Sound Wall

Another great example of collaboration has been Tractor's recently completed "Sound Wall" for Coca-Cola in Port Elizabeth.

In the shape of the Coca-Cola dynamic ribbon, the installation of a 22m working xylophone, which forms the wave of the ocean in a mural design, was completed in Port Elizabeth last month, bringing both music and happiness to the community.

The only mural and installation combo of its kind, the Coca-Cola 'Sound Wall' can be seen - and heard - on the outside wall of Bayworld Aquarium on Marine Drive, where it will be on display for about a year.

The Sound Wall's xylophone installation repeatedly plays the Coca-Cola jingle followed by a full piano scale, strengthening the connection that the Coca-Cola brand has always had with music - both of which bring happiness to the lives of its consumers.

The xylophone was designed by advertising agency, FCB, in Johannesburg, in close collaboration with Tractor Outdoor. FCB developed the Sound Wall as a unique part of Coca-Cola's 'OOH sites' across the country which aim to bring happiness into people's lives.



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All the above examples do not form part of the standard rate card that gets sent to clients or agency, but these are all the results of a deep relationship with client, agency and media owner.

So to paraphrase that inimitable 90's hip-hop icon, Vanilla Ice - Stop. Collaborate and Listen - it's amazing what we can

produce when we all work together.

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